

TIDINGS

Saint Bede Monastery and Center

A Newsletter from The Sisters of Saint Benedict
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Eau Claire, Wisconsin
WINTER 2009

The Word Alive And Handed On

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever." (Isaiah 40:8)



Terry Sheridan prepares for his scripture study group.

Graduates of the rigorous, four-year Diocesan School of Biblical Studies (DSBS) course, taught by Sister Margaret Michaud over the past 15 years at Saint Bede Center, continues to touch the lives of others in many ways.

For example, Dr. Phil Chenier, retired as UW-Eau Claire chemistry professor now living in Hudson, WI, graduated from the DSBS program. Chenier also participated in a long-running bible study program at his parish, St. James the Greater.

"It's marvelous," said Fr. John Schultz, pastor there for more than 18 years. "It's an area-wide event -- hosted, sponsored and subsidized by the parish. Our (Monday evening) attendance is in the 70s."

Father John said Chenier, some seven years ago, "transformed" the program, which uses the Little Rock Scripture Series. Currently, he said, the focus is on St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians, Galatians, and Ephesians.

Sister Margaret, he added, is always invited to deliver the opening presentation for each new study segment.

"When I spoke there in October," Sister Margaret said, "the program was going strong. It's very rewarding to know that graduates from our course (other instructors teach the DSBS course at Stevens Point and La Crosse) are sharing their knowledge with others."

Today, Steve Dickoff and Terry Sheridan, graduates of Sister Margaret's 2007 DSBS class, are leading biblical studies in programs they developed to meet the needs of parents and other adults in their Newman Community parish.

Dickoff is a 1969 Regis High graduate had Sister Margaret for numerous math classes. He liked his DSBS course so much that he re-enrolled for two years in the next cycle of the program.

"She's a great story teller," said Dickoff, whose multi-faceted career now involves recruiting health professionals for Marshfield Clinic.

His Newman Parish study group meets on Wednesdays, from 6 to 7:15 p.m. in Saint Bede Center's Fireside Room. It is designed for parents whose K-eighth grade children are participating in the parish's religious education program, held elsewhere in the building.

"Terry and I are very flexible in our classes," Dickoff said. "We've decided that my group and his will meet every other week -- six sessions over twelve weeks. Then we'll repeat that cycle in January. So far, we've had about 11 members in our first discussion sessions and we're off to a great start."

Terry Sheridan, retired educator in Eau Claire, described his role in the Newman program.

"We plan to keep our group going by meeting at 9:30 a.m. every other Tuesday for an hour or an hour and a half in each others' homes," he said. Meeting topics, he added, include the readings from the lectionary for upcoming Sunday liturgies along with commentaries and other background material.

Terry and his wife Flo, long-time administrative coordinator at Newman Parish, were among the DSBS students who traveled to Israel and Jordan in 2008. Terry noted that the DSBS class and the experience in the Holy Land "brought the word of God alive."

Although he says he's "no biblical scholar," he clearly notes, "I know it's critically important to put the brief readings of the church year into context. The idea and the message are so much deeper."



*Steve Dickoff and Sue McNally
Newman Scripture Class*



**Sister Michaela Hedican,
OSB Prioress**

TIDINGS

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Monastic Musings — Sister Michaela Hedican, OSB

Host, hostility, hospitality – all three words share the same root: guest. We either welcome and enliven guests or we refuse them entrance into our lives and reject them. St. Benedict's approach to the guest is unequivocal – "All guests are to be welcomed as Christ." (RB 53:1)

In a world filled with suspicion of the outsider, apprehension of the stranger, and uneasiness with anyone who is different from us, St. Benedict's injunction is a counter-cultural challenge.

Benedictine women of North America responded to this challenge as related in their statement, "Wisdom from the Tradition," which shows us how Benedictines now and through the centuries welcome all as Christ. Monasteries of Benedict's time were the original hotels and hospitals as they cared for those in need. They were the first to recognize the importance of a welcoming spirit – the first, should we say, "To leave the light on for you." Monasteries today carry on this tradition.

The hospitality we are called to live includes our being open to family and community members who hold differing opinions from ours, those in our local area who have no place to call home, or those throughout the world who are refugees, displaced, or without family.

Benedict's model for hospitality was Christ, whose actions and words showed the way of welcome. To all, Christ's word was always, "Come." Christ touched, healed, and saved those rejected by the customs of the day. Guests are a gift to us from God, inviting us to find Christ.

As followers of Christ in a world of rejected people, we are called to be hosts offering hospitality, not hostility, to all.

In many ways this is the message of the Advent/Christmas season. God welcomes us in Christ and calls us to extend that same welcome to each others.

PONDERINGS:

When have you experienced hospitality?

To whom do you extend hospitality?

Our Unfolding Future

— Sister Michaela Hedican

**"Crowd upon crowd in the valley of decision;
for near is the day of the Lord in the valley of decision" (Joel: 3:14)**

Long ago the prophet Joel spoke of the many people who are a part of any decision. His reference to a "valley of decision" describes us, despite our living on a hill.

Our community entered that "valley of decision" when we decided to sell our monastery and property in August 2007. Under the direction of Mr. David Mickelson local real estate agent for Century 21, this past year has been spent working with interested parties in the Chippewa Valley. In June 2009, these efforts were joined with the expertise of a commercial real estate company, Frauenshuh, Inc. from Minneapolis, MN. Marketing our facility from coast-to-coast, Frauenshuh has generated much interest. Tours of the monastery, center, and property have begun.

Being in this "valley of decision" has also included discernment by the Sisters for relocation. Much time has been spent in praying, discussing, and discerning where God is calling us. Presently, we are in conversation with Saint Benedict's Monastery, St. Joseph, MN, about their being a receiving community for us. Our roots are at Saint Benedict's from where 11 of our current 29 Sisters originally came to start Saint Bede Monastery. Both of our communities will be prayerfully discerning the possibility of our becoming one again.

Though there are many details that need to be tended, we are continuing to move through the "valley of decision" and are confident of the presence of the Lord in this process. We are grateful for your prayers and support during this time – we count on them.

Visit us at: www.saintbede.org

✠ Open Doors

Blessings daily come to us
through open doors.
Over many, many years
we have found it so.

You have come to us
Students who yearned for truth –
knowledge that helped them grow
Persons who served in circles of life
who came for inner strength
through our open door.
They came and found a calming peace
and left with so much more!

Hundreds upon hundreds have graced
our doors and left enriched, refreshed.
They found an inner peace
in discovering the core of love
that stretches far beyond
one's humdrum daily life.

We, too, who live within these walls
who welcome all who come
Have received so many blessings
as together we shared life's dreams.

Friends –
You, too, have opened many doors
and entrusted to us your gifts
in the richness that life has given you
you have blessed us with utmost love.

We pray that though our doors
may close
yours will continue to swing both ways –
As you open to give to others,
you, too, will graciously receive!

The stable in Bethlehem
had no doors
Freely people came and worshiped
and were blessed: through life they continue
to come – reach out – receive and give!

... Sister Dale Wollum, OSB

Reaching Out

— Sister Dale Wollum, OSB



□ **Sister Michaela Hedican, Prioress**, served as a Marriage Encounter team member during October 17-18 at Saint Bede Center. Seven couples attended the program. The Sisters have hosted the program for the past 31 years. Sister Michaela also gave a talk, "Everyday Catholic," November 4 during Family Night, an event hosted by Sacred Heart of Jesus/St. Patrick Parish. During November 15-19 she attended the AIM USA board meeting, joined by the International AIM board at Mount St. Benedict Monastery at Erie, PA. On December 8, Sister Michaela will speak on "How to Recognize Grace" at a program hosted by the Newman Student Association at Newman Community Parish, Eau Claire.

□ **Sister Karen Streveler**, Saint Bede's Treasurer, during Oct. 20-23, attended the 2009 National Conference of the Resources Center for Religious Institutions at Atlanta, GA. The RCRI provides financial, legal, and other advice for religious administrators.



Sister Karen Streveler

□ **Sister Ruth Feeney**, Sub-Prioress/Secretary, on October 21 celebrated Vocations Day at St. Joseph's Parish, Elk Mound, and also at St. Joseph's, Rock Falls. Deacon Bob Hanson (Tri parishes at Durand, Lima and Mondovi) addressed the combined religious education students at St. Joseph's, Elk Mound, and responded to their questions. Sister Ruth noted that she was pleased to return to "the parish of her youth to speak about the roots of her vocation." She also commended the students for their preparations for the event and taking leadership roles at Eucharist.



Sister Ruth Feeney

Sisters Invited to NRRO Grant Workshop To Explore Funding for Planning Future

— Sister Margaret Michaud, OSB

Catholics throughout the nation have responded generously to the annual collection of funds for the retirement of religious. Recognizing that many communities did not have adequate finances to provide for their members' retirement needs, the U.S. Catholic Bishops decided to ask the people in the



Sisters Margaret Michaud, Karen Streveler, Michaela Hedican with NRRO Consultants Sister Sue Antone-Fricke, O.S.F., and Brother Steve Glodek, M.M.

parishes to contribute for this purpose. Initially the collection was to have been conducted annually for ten years. Since its beginning in 1988 it has been approved twice more for ten years at a time. This year will be the 22nd collection.

This collection for religious members has become the most successful nationwide outpouring of generosity in the history of the Church in the United States. The communities lacking funds for retirements receive grants each year. To date, at Saint Bede, the Sisters have received a National Religious Retirement Organization grant since the beginning of the program. These basic grants have helped us build and grow our Community Support Fund.

Besides the basic grants, communities may apply for a special grant to help us with a specific project or need. This year, since our monastery is facing significant expenditures related to our future planning, we decided to apply for a special grant. The NRRO handles the applications and makes the grants. To make the grants more effective, long term, the organization held workshops for the applicants. Thus, Sisters Michaela, as prioress, Karen, as treasurer, and Sister Margaret, coordinator of the Sisters' unit at Clairemont Nursing and Rehabilitation, attended the workshop at Bon Secours Spiritual Center in Marriottsville, MN.

The workshop covered a full range of issues related to retirement planning. Each community was assigned two NRRO consultants with expertise in these areas. Presentations were given and there were opportunities for discussion and reflection. Also addressed were care delivery aspects and financial considerations.

With help from the NRRO consultants, when we returned to the monastery, we submitted the application for the grant. News of the award should be coming in December.

All this is possible because of the generosity of Catholics throughout the country. At Saint Bede we are deeply grateful for the help we have received over the years from the NRRO. Each day as we gather to pray, we remember all our friends who have supported us in so many ways. In a special way we recognize those who have contributed to the annual collection. May their generous hearts be blessed with God's abundant graces.

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Book Talk — Dr. Ronald Warloski



I first met James Martin, S.J. when I reviewed his [A Jesuit on Broadway](#) some time ago. So I was interested when I encountered another of his books, [My life with the Saints](#) (Loyola Press, 2007). The interest was justified. He walks us through his list of saints to whom he is devoted and from whom he draws inspiration. Each saint – a total of 16 – is introduced as part of his own life, explaining how and why that saint became special to him as a companion and patron. The book is a telling tale of one person's journey.

Since “sanctity” is God’s goal for each of us,” the role of saints is of companions in our pursuit of sanctity – particularly when we fail. They also are models of what the many faces of sanctity look like. We can’t be them. But they can help us become ourselves.

The book also has a “For Further Reading” section at the end. I found it particularly helpful. It is not a list of pious exhortations but rather a compendium of books that the author critically evaluates.

Again, having trouble with books I wanted to review, I turned to my ever faithful friend, Sr. Margaret. She gave me three new books: Wil Derske, [A Blessed Life: Benedictine Guidelines for Those Who Long for Good Days](#); Esther de Waal, [Seeking Life: The Baptismal Invitations of the Rule of St. Benedict](#), and Abbot Christopher Jamison, [Finding Happiness: Monastic Steps for a Fulfilling Life](#) (all from Liturgical Press, 2009). My first reaction was a distinctive lack of enthusiasm. I wondered what on God’s earth could be said about the Benedictine way of life that hasn’t already been said many times. But I trust Sr. Margaret so I started reading. I really don’t know if there is anything really new in these three books, but that’s OK. They each in their way lead the reader on a spiritual road well traveled in ways that inspire one to keep walking or start walking.

Esther de Waal’s is the meatiest book. In fact, I had trouble with parts of it. But it was a solid reflection on the Benedictine mind confronting very important themes – like Holy Week. She also has a marvelous section called “Reflections” in which she takes on such topics as: The Battle, Good Deeds, Love, and Continuing to Learn.

Wil Derks’ book is a straightforward discussion of Benedictine guidelines for living, but very well done – an easy-to-understand compendium of the Benedictine lifestyle. I recommend it to those who want to begin to understand the Benedictines. I liked Abbot Jamison’s book the best. It is both simple and profound. He goes through Acedia, Gluttony, Lust, Greed, Anger, Sadness, Vanity, and Pride, offering analysis, comments and suggestions.

Author’s Note: Saint Bede’s library is a treasure trove of books and periodicals on multiple subjects in Religion. There also is a solid collection of dictionaries on religious subjects. Material can be found on religious topics such as social ethics, catechesis, the Old Testament, the New Testament, monastic life, biography, women’s spirituality, prayer, the Church, history of religion, and American Catholicism. There are books for neophytes and experts. The basic orientation is analysis of the topics, both critical and appreciative. It is an appropriate library for a Benedictine monastery, all of which are centers of learning.

Marriage Encounter Weekend



Marriage Encounter Team
October 17 - 18, 2009

Mike & Mary Sokup | Ken & Sue Ripp | Sister Michaela Hedican | Ray & Betty Hurst | Fr. Frank Corradi, president for Mass



Mike Sokup (left) and Steve Bohrer
lead the music for Mass
on the Marriage Encounter weekend

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Lay Associates Enjoy Ties With Benedictine Sisters



Ken Novak,
Lay Associate

The Sisters' Lay Associate program has been inviting Christian women and men to share the wisdom of a tradition begun 1,500 years ago by St. Benedict. Today, about 30 people have made formal commitments as associates or are otherwise affiliated with the program through spiritual learning prayer, and enjoyment of the Sisters' many forms of hospitality.

Ken Novak, an associate for three years, made his formal commitment last March 10.

"I'd been invited by Sister Michaela (Hedican)," prioress and a former coordinator of the program, said Mr. Novak, a member of Eau Claire's Sacred Heart Parish. Further encouragement came from good friend and neighbor, Mary Ann Bluem, who does development work for Saint Bede and Regis High School, and, like Ken, serves as a mailing volunteer for the Sisters' publications.

"I'm basically quiet and an observer by nature," he said. "I found the reading of the Rule's descriptions of listening for God's voice with the heart has become increasingly important to me."

The Superior, WI native, son of a Great Lakes ore boat fireman, said he grew up with no formal religious background. Later in life he struggled with a series of medical setbacks -- one involving serious injuries when his vehicle was rear-ended by a speeding motorist. Over the years he has helped others through work with community social agencies and other organizations, delivering meals for the homebound, and through other services.

Ken also visits and assists the seven Benedictine Sisters now living at Clairemont Nursing and Rehabilitation.

"I visit Sisters Helenette (Baltes) and Dorothy (Eisold) on Wednesday afternoons, and (the late) Maryanne Dooher and Sister Roma Paulus before that," he said. "I help Sisters Mary Jo Donaldson and Dorothy with their wheelchairs when they take exercise breaks outside the building."

Asked about his favorite Benedictine, Ken said, "I can't pick out just one. It's them, being in their company."

Sister Margaret Michaud, present coordinator of the

associates and a former Saint Bede prioress, "taught me to slow down -- that you can have a fast-paced life but you don't have to hurry. My readings of the Rule of Benedict he added, "are leading me to a deeper pondering of the wisdom there for issues in my life. The words are comforting and inviting. I've become an avid listener."

Judy Layde writes...

We in North Central Wisconsin have been blessed to have an established monastic community who believe that sharing their Benedictine heritage is a worthy ministry in today's challenging world. The Sisters follow the Rule of Saint Benedict which was written in the Sixth Century. Although it is called a rule, it is more a book of insights about Christian living. It speaks to all of us in the Twenty First Century.

In Eau Claire there are Benedictine lay associates who meet monthly at the monastery to learn and live Benedictine values. I have been an associate for 10 years. Being able to study, pray, and work with the Sisters has been a rewarding opportunity.

We all live in difficult times and this ancient Rule of Saint Benedict calls us to be a model of people that is gentle with others, the earth, and ourselves. I especially love the simplicity of the rule: To seek God in the ordinary routine activities of family life.

But to keep an awareness of God in our hearts as we go about our hectic days is not always easy. Having the wisdom and tradition of the Sisters of Saint Bede to support us in our journey is a precious gift. Living in peace and sharing it with others remains the quest of all Benedictines.



Judy Layde (left) a Benedictine Lay Associate & a volunteer, assists Sister Lucy Miller prepare for guests

Associates Enjoy Program On St. John's Bible Project

Lay Associates, with Sisters Mary Jane Cournoyer, Margaret Michaud and Mary Pattison learned more about how scholarship, art, technology, and the Benedictine traditions resulted in the widely acclaimed exhibit of the St. John Abbey's Bible project. A traveling display of the project at Saint Bede Center in 2009 drew hundreds of visits to Saint Bede Center. Many of the hand-produced illuminations and calligraphy, enhanced by modern technology, have become the subjects of artistic prints and greeting cards.

The Associates, directed by Sister Margaret set their next meeting for 2:30 p.m. Sunday, November 22. Larry Martin, an Associate and UW-Eau Claire faculty member, will speak on the hymns of the Breviary. The group also will meet for an Advent day of reflection on Saturday, December 5, for a program entitled "Turn off the Christmas Machine; Simplicity in Advent and Christmas." Presenters are Liz Kerwin, CSJ, and Barbara Leonard from the Loyola Spirituality Center, St. Paul, MN.

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Developments

— James A. Schwartz, Director of Development

God Provides Many Hands In Guiding Sisters' Decisions

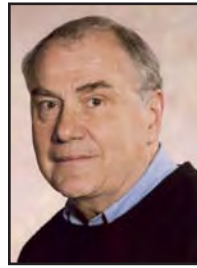
In the book, "Wisdom from the Tradition," a statement by North American Benedictines "in response to our times," the authors, Benedictine Prioresses, describe the monastic life as "a communal journey."

Since their establishment in 1948 of a motherhouse in Eau Claire, the Sisters of Saint Bede Monastery have prayed, worked and upheld their 1,500-year Benedictine traditions as a community.

They have met countless challenges together. The Sisters have served others in classrooms, health care facilities, parishes, and in various administrative and professional posts. They have concentrated their efforts in the Chippewa Valley but also have touched the lives of many in other states and several foreign countries. Each Sister has accepted roles needed by her monastery. Some have served in leadership posts for the Diocese of La Crosse and for the wider Benedictine Community.

Referring to the values of unselfishness, sharing and accepted responsibility by members of a Benedictine community, the authors of "Wisdom from the Tradition" note that "He (Saint Benedict) refers to the Acts of the Apostles for this pattern: the earliest Christian community of believers of whom it is written that they held everything in common and bore witness to the dawning reign of God with great joy (Acts 2:42-46).

This is the spirit of the Sisters as they contribute their prayers, talents and energies to discerning their future, accompanied by the generosity of many friends. Meanwhile, their charism of hospitality is reflected in the ecumenical and welcoming tradition of Saint Bede Center and the prayers the Sisters offer at three daily gatherings in Saint Bede Chapel.



James A. Schwartz
Director of Development

Briefly items..

Make Plans for Tenth Dinner Beyond the Hill

• This gala dinner-auction-entertainment event, a fun-filled precursor to Valentine's Day which benefits the Sister's Retirement Fund, again will draw hundreds of guests to Eau Claire's Best Western Trail Lodge & Suites. Please mark your calendar for Saturday, February 13. The event features a fine dinner with gourmet desserts, opportunities to bid on live and silent auction items, and lively entertainment.. Please contact Linda Dekan at (715) 834-7130 for information about hosting or sponsoring a table (\$300) or the event itself. Auction items also are appreciated. We look forward to seeing you there!

• Spirituality, service to others, and hospitality are hallmarks of the Benedictine tradition. The Sisters of Saint Bede Monastery invite you to pray with them in St. Bede Chapel and/or explore the amenities of Saint Bede Center. You are always welcome here.



Christ is Born!

BITS AND CENTER PIECES -Continued from Page 8

cut and presentable, it was not carved perfectly, yet tasted wonderful!

The most worthy Christmas observances are probably not the ones we plan. Mary's precious child came to earth while she was away from home. The human condition into which Jesus came was, and continues to be, chaotic, unpredictable, and certainly not according to "our plans."

May your Christmas plans be disrupted and rearranged by great impulses of God's amazing love. May your creativity turn 'ducks' to dinner, and may the love that God's Son came to bring us all, bless you with wonderful Christmas joy.

Leave Your Legacy

Consider joining the Heritage Companions of Saint Bede

Membership and recognition are extended to friends planning to remember the Sisters in their wills. Your gift will help perpetuate the Benedictine traditions of prayer, hospitality, service and sharing with others.

Yes - I'd like to learn more about becoming a **Heritage Companion**.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone (optional) _____

(Clip and Mail to the Development Office, Saint Bede Monastery, PO Box 66, Eau Claire, WI 54702)

UPCOMING CENTER EVENTS

- **Dec. 5:** Advent Retreat – **Unplug the Christmas Machine: Simplicity in Advent and Christmas** 9 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. with Liz Kerwin, CSJ and Barbara Leonard -- from Loyola Spirituality Center, St. Paul, MN
- **Dec. 19:** Diocesan School of Biblical Studies
- **Dec 21:** Observance – **Longest Night – Solstice** – 7-9 p.m.
- **Jan. 10:** **A Way of Wisdom for Troubled Times** - with S. Michaela Hedican, OSB, and Bob Lesniewski
- **Jan. 16-17:** **Marriage Encounter Weekend**
- **Jan. 20:** Religious Education Teacher In-Service/Certification Evening - speaker, Jen Engel, **Stages of Development in Children Relating to Faith Development** - sponsored by the Chippewa Valley Deanery Directors of Religious Education
- **Jan. 23 and Feb. 27:** Diocesan School of Biblical Studies

Are you part of an organization, committee or support group looking for a place to hold your meetings, workshops or retreats? Consider Saint Bede Center - peaceful, private accommodations in a natural setting - perfect for accomplishing the task at hand. Let us be your host. **Call us at 715-834-8642**



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WINTER 2009

BITS AND CENTER PIECES



– *Sister Judith Kramer, OSB*

The Sister who ably cooked for the six of us on “the mission” had taken a tumble and broken her leg. This greatly complicated her already painful situation with crippling arthritis. It was decided that she would go to a care center in a larger city for rehabilitation and therapy.

Christmas was a couple of weeks away and the school schedule was heavy; we had double grades in bulging classrooms. The school Christmas program was to be a major production and the altar Christmas flowers and décor fell to “the Sister sacristan.” The Sisters didn’t have a car in those days so any shopping would be done on foot in the local small town. It was going to be a frantic, simple Christmas!

Parishioners, neighbors, families, and town businesses kindly remembered us with gifts and goods. Our pantry was well stocked and the freezer near full. The crowning gift came four days before Christmas and we still had a day to go...a kind family brought us two ducks for our

Christmas dinner. They raised fowl for a bit of extra cash and their gift was very kind...but the ducks, though de-feathered, were not drawn and cleaned. As a farmer’s daughter, I could not plead ignorance or incapability. There were several other tasks that seemed more pressing that night than preparing two ducks, but it had to be done! Among my sister colleagues, I had one willing assistant who stood at my side and executed every stroke on her bird as I did on mine, to clean and prepare the birds for roasting.

Many of the usual Christmas customs and observances which we had thought were essential, had to be abandoned, rearranged, or simplified that year. The parish altar décor was simpler, the gifts that we Sisters exchanged were modest, fewer Christmas cards were written and sent, and the convent chapel and Christmas tree were very simply adorned. I do recall, however, the great sense of joy and service I felt as I carried the platter of roast duck to our table on Christmas Day. We had studied the recipe books for the proper orange sauce and dressing for the bird, and though

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